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CONGRATULATIONS
CLASS OF
2016!

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3,511 degrees given at commencement ceremony on Friday

*Damon awarded pirate's license,
senior gift once again breaks record*

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EDITORS

MIT's 2016 commencement ceremony took place Friday, June 3. The Institute awarded 1,111 bachelor's degrees, 1,744 master's degrees, 10 Engineer degrees, and 646 doctoral degrees.

Actor Matt Damon, who has starred in movies such as *The Martian* and *Good Will Hunting*, was the guest speaker for the event. In his speech, he urged the graduates to "turn towards" the world's most pressing problems. He discussed his activism in the cause of providing clean water across the globe.

Anish D. Punjabi '16, president of the senior class, presented the senior class gift to MIT president L. Rafael Reif. The gift once again set records this year for participation and amount raised — 87.7 percent of the senior class, or 914 people, donated in order to raise a total of \$22,141.75. Steve Kaufman '63 and Debby Sharpe '76 provided the challenge grants for this year's senior gift challenge.

1,076 undergraduates and 1,780 graduates were present in Killian Court to receive their diplomas. They processed all the way from the Z Center and across Mass Ave onto the lawn in Killian, led by alumni from the class of 1966 and MIT faculty.

The 1966 alumni looked dapper in red jackets and straw hats. Many wore red-and-gray striped ties or bowties. One man with a bushy silver beard sported a Santa suit. When he sat down, he took off his jacket, revealing the stuffed backpack he was wearing on his stomach.

The faculty wore the usual array of colorful doctoral regalia. There were blues and browns, purples and blacks, oranges and indigos, and, of

course, grays and reds.

MIT Corporation members, sitting stage right on the commencement stage, wore dark gray robes. Chairman Robert B. Millard '73 led the opening of the commencement exercises and introduced guest speaker Matt Damon.

During his address, Matt Damon recalled growing up in Cambridge with fellow actor Ben Affleck, saying that their teenage impression of the Institute was that "MIT was kind of *The Man ...* This big, impressive, impersonal force."

While his speech was both serious and politically charged at times, it was also humorous. Damon poked fun at himself for attending two fake graduations in his hometown. Damon attended Harvard from 1988 to 1992, and while he did not receive a degree, he walked during the commencement ceremony.

He recalled visiting MIT with his brother Kyle, an artist, who inspired parts of Damon's film *Good Will Hunting* which is set at MIT. Damon's brother wrote a fake, though impressive-looking, equation on a chalkboard he found in a hallway.

"Because these kids are so smart they just need to, you know, drop everything and solve problems!" Damon said, explaining why he thought that chalkboards lined MIT hallways.

Damon went on to discuss simulation theory — the theory that our entire universe is merely one of trillions of simulations run on a computer by a more advanced civilization.

"If there are multiple simulations, how come we're in the one where Donald Trump becomes the Republican nominee? Can we, like, transfer to a different one?" Damon quipped, one of several political remarks he made throughout his address.



DANIEL MIRNY—THE TECH

President Reif, Anish D. Punjabi '16, and Matt Damon pose for the camera after Damon receives his honorary pirate's license.

While the jury is out regarding simulation theory for scientists and philosophers, Damon says that whether or not this world is real or just a simulation, what we do matters. "This world has some problems we need you to drop everything and solve."

He invited graduates to take their pick from the "world's worst buffet," including climate change, refugee crises, institutional racism, pandemics, and more.

Damon's most pointed remarks of the morning included a brief tirade on the investment bankers who committed "the biggest heist in history."

"It was theft and you knew it. It was fraud and you knew it ... I don't know if justice is coming for you in this life or the next. But if justice does come for you in this life ... her name is Elizabeth Warren," Damon said to laughter in the audience.

Damon discussed his humanitarian efforts around the globe, particularly his efforts to provide clean water to impoverished areas lacking this basic but essential need.

As he neared the end of his address, Damon told the graduates to keep in mind that failure is inevitable at times, but it is also an opportunity.

He implored graduates to keep listening and learning, telling them that despite it being graduation day, it's "not the day you switch from 'receive' to 'transmit.'"

"The truth is, we can't science the shit out of every problem," he said, making a reference to a line his character delivered in *The Martian*. "There is not always a freaking app for that."

He comes back to water, saying the problem is too complex for a quick scientific fix. "We need to be just as innovative in public policy, just as innovative in our financial models."

Throughout the speech, Damon made a few jokes about "fake graduating" and not having a degree, so of course, MIT couldn't let Damon leave campus empty-handed. MIT has does not grant honorary degrees, but President Reif presented Damon with the next best thing: an honorary pirate's license.

Reif cited how Matt Damon's character in *The Martian* referred to himself as a "space pirate" when he had to cross Mars, which counts as "international waters," in order to commandeer a spaceship. The Institute president said Damon's influence has done a lot to further

a "swashbuckling appreciation of science, engineering, and space exploration."

Reif delivered the traditional charge to the graduates, referencing the MIT team that won SpaceX's Hyperloop challenge, Random Acts of Kindness week, and Lydia A. Krasilnikova '14's blog post that analyzed data about the underwear of MIT students.

The class of 2016 was the first class that Reif saw all the way through the Institute as president. (He began his tenure in 2012, the same year the class of 2016 arrived on campus.)

He called them "magnificent company," recalling a 2013 snowball fight in Killian Court that he participated in. More solemnly, he described how, over the past four years, the community dealt with "tragic losses," "faced hard facts" about itself, and "worked together to make things better."

He charged the graduates to go out and "make the world a little more like MIT" and urged them to use not only mind and hand but also heart: "[H]eart is what makes the hard problems worth solving. Heart is what makes the data sing with meaning. Heart is your best blueprint as you invent the future."

IN SHORT

The elevator in W20 closest to the Coop is now operational after months of renovation.

The other elevator in W20, closest to LaVerde's, will be out of service starting June 6 for renovation.

LaVerde's Market summer hours will be 7:00am-11:00pm every day.

The elevator in building 24 will also be closed starting June 6 for modernization. New equipment and new cab finishes will be installed.

The deadline for UROP sponsored, credit, and volunteer proposals is June 16.

Send news and tips to news@tech.mit.edu.

Matt Damon talks science, movies, impact

The actor is "fascinated" by artificial intelligence, would make movie about it

By Karleigh Moore
EDITOR

The Tech had an opportunity to speak with Matt Damon before he gave the commencement address to the class of 2016. The actor discussed some of his opinions on science fiction, the film industry, and how to get involved in solving global problems.

Damon is a Cambridge native who has recently appeared in movies such as *The Martian* and *Interstellar*. He shared the Oscar for best original screenplay with his childhood friend Ben Affleck in 1997 for the film *Good Will Hunting*. He also co-founded Water.org, an organization that seeks to help communities around the world gain access to clean water and sanitation.

The Tech: You've been involved

with some science movies lately. Would you say that these films inspire people to get involved with science?

Matt Damon: I don't know. I hope so. I certainly hope that — *The Martian* was certainly a pro-science kind of [movie]...when I first met the writer of the movie, he called it a love letter to science, and that was why he wanted to do it. So I think the hope for all of us who made it was [that] the adolescents who saw it would think it was really cool and maybe give science another look. But I guess there's no way to predict what people are gonna do.

The Tech: Personally, I got involved with science because of movies about space. And movies about space — they probably sell really well...are there any other topics that you think would be really cool to

make movies about that have to do with science and technology?

Damon: To answer that in one way I would say what science fiction allows you to do is ... say things more explicitly, [things that] would feel maybe preachy if you made a straight-ahead, literal movie. So you can kind of speak in metaphors and use science fiction to kind of camouflage a greater point that you want to make.

But in terms of things I would like to make a movie about ... I'm fascinated by [artificial intelligence], and I'm fascinated to know where it's all going. I think everybody who reads about it, it suddenly becomes the most important topic, you know? I've met [Demis Hassabis], the guy who's running DeepMind at Google, and he's got a group of hundreds of PhDs who sit in a room and they're

kind of trying to figure out how to do this and how to do it so that it's benevolent, and I think that's a very fertile area. Things are changing so rapidly technologically that I would be loathe to make a movie about a specific gadget because it would be obsolete before the thing came out on HBO. But these bigger ideas of AI and what those mean to us and what the implications are for us and how does that change human existence, I think those are really interesting issues.

The Tech: You're going to be addressing a bunch of MIT graduates today. For people who aren't really sure how to get involved — I'm sure my classmates are eager to make the world a better place — but if you're not really sure where to get started



Photography by Daniel Mirny



with that, what would you encourage them to do?

Damon: I was lucky because I got to go out — I had the money to go out into the field and the access to visit a lot of programs as I was thinking about exactly that question. I think today with the Internet, there's so much information available that if you have a real desire to engage, which you must, it's about getting information and trying to learn as much as you can about all these various problems.

Start with — just intuit — what speaks to you and what feels like something you want to spend your time on. It doesn't have to be a call-

ing perse, but there are differences with all of these issues and how they land with you emotionally and maybe start there. Because it takes a lot of work, and like anything you do that you really engage in and want to do well, it requires so much work and so it helps if you love it. I mean, and that's for anything. I'd feel that way about my day job, too.

The Tech: I review movies for [The Tech]. I wonder, as an actor, what is your least favorite trope? Do you ever just read a script and go, 'Seriously? You're gonna make me do that?'

Damon: I think nowadays I'm so depressed about ... things because movies have changed since I was where you are. That was 25

years ago. Because of these bigger influences on the business, now they're making these giant, giant movies that are these 300 million dollar behemoths, and they're all about people in capes running around...

I'd say what irks me the most right now is that the movies that were my bread and butter, you know, the *Good Will Hunting*-type movies, or *The Informant*, or movies like that, that range from say 20 to 60 million dollars and are about people talking to each other, have just evaporated. They're just gone. They're not being made anymore. They're either being migrated to television, or they have to be made for extremely low budgets. And

they've been replaced by these 500 million dollar juggernauts that the movie audience doesn't seem to be getting tired of. And that's what's alarming, like normally these things move in phases and there's a correction, there's kind of a re-correction and a rebalance and we kind of get back to how we all like entertainment. But right now, it looks like there hasn't been that correction. In fact, I'm thinking of one thing that bothers me; it's that the scripts have become so simple, and the stories have become so simple and predictable, and we're not getting tired of them yet.

This interview has been edited for clarity.

The June 3 issue of The Tech neglected to note that Saul Blumental also contributed to photography for the page 9 spread about Crossing the Charles.

